

## Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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AMCONSUL ADANA

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SUBJ: POLICE CLOSE BRIDGES AS STUDENT DEATH SPARKS PROTEST

REF: ISTANBUL 3236 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY: THE DEATH OF A STUDENT LEFTIST FOLLOWING A LEFT-RIGHT CLASH ON DEC. 19 LED TO PROTEST MEETINGS AT VARIOUS UNIVERSITIES ON DEC. 20. THE EFFORT OF VARIOUS GROUPS TO LINK UP AT AKSIM SQUARE FRUSTRATED BY CLOSING OF THE GOLDEN HORN BRIDGES. ALERT HANDLING BY THE POLICE HAS SO FAR HELPED AVOID FURTHER VIOLENCE. END SUMMARY

1. A CLASH BETWEEN RIGHT AND LEFT-WING STUDENT GROUPS IN BESIKTAS ON THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER RESULTED IN THE STABBING DEATH OF SAHIN AYDIN, A 23-YEAR OLD LEFTIST STUDENT OF THE YILDIZ DEVLET MUHENDISLIK VE MIMARLIK AKADEMESI. ON THE FOLLOWING DAY STUDENT GROUPS CONVENED AT A NUMBER OF LOCATIONS IN THE CITY TO PROTEST THE DEATH AND TO CONDEMN THE RIGHT-WING "FASCISTS". THE LARGEST RALLY (REPORTEDLY BY 3000-4000 STUDENTS) FORMED AT BEYAZIT NEAR THE ISTANBUL UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN THE OLD CITY. SIMULTANEOUSLY, IN THE BEYOGLU AREA GROUPS FORMED AT THE ISTANBUL TECHNICAL

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UNIVERSITY MACKA CAMPUS AND AT THE YILDIZ ACADEMY, EACH

ESTIMATED BETWEEN 1000 AND 1500 STUDENTS.

2. ALTHOUGH THE POLICE HAD BEEN INFORMED IN ADVANCE OF THE PLAN FOR THESE STUDENT PROTESTS, THE ON-THE-SPOT ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE STUDENT LEADERS TO MARCH FROM THE UNIVERSITY TO TAKSIM SQUARE ACROSS THE GOLDEN HORN IN THE BEYOGLU SECTION OF THE CITY CAUGHT THE AUTHORITIES BY SURPRISE. IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE LINK-UP OF THE SEPARATE PROTESTING GROUPS, AND TO LESSEN THE DANGER OF EVENTS GETTING OUT OF HAND, THE AUTHORITIES TOOK THE EXTRAORDINARY PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE OF CLOSING THE GALATA AND ATATURK BRIDGES ACROSS THE GOLDEN HORN (ACCOMPLISHED BY FLOATING OUT THE MIDDLE SECTIONS). THIS DECISION WAS TAKEN BECAUSE OF THE PROXIMITY OF SEVERAL FOREIGN CONSULATES TO TAKSIM SQUARE AND THE EXPECTATION THAT THE CROWD COULD SWELL TO BETWEEN 6000 - 10,000 PERSONS ONCE THE VARIOUS STUDENT GROUPS JOINED UP THERE.

3. PREVENTED FROM CROSSING INTO BEYOGLU, THE STUDENTS AT BEYAZIT MARCHED TO THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING AND THEN DISPERSED; THOSE FROM THE ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY AND YILDIZ ALSO DISPERSED WITHOUT INCIDENT, FOLLOWING THE MARCH BY SOME STUDENTS TO BESIKTAS WHERE THE STABBING INCIDENT HAD TAKEN PLACE. BY MID-AFTERNOON THE SITUATION HAD RETURNED TO NORMAL AND THE BRIDGES WERE AGAIN OPENED TO TRAFFIC.

4. ON DEC. 22 AUTHORITIES GRANTED A REQUEST BY THE STUDENTS TO CONDUCT A CEREMONY BEFORE AYDIN'S BODY WAS SENT TO HIS HOME TOWN FOR BURIAL. THE AUTHORITIES RETAINED THE BODY IN CUSTODY UNTIL THE TIME OF THE CEREMONY, WHICH TOOK PLACE AT SULTAN AHMET SQUARE AND REPORTEDLY COMPRISED ABOUT 3000 PERSONS. STRICT SECURITY PRECAUTIONS WERE TAKEN IN THE AREA AND NO INCIDENTS MARRED THE EVENT.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE OSTENSIBLE REASON FOR THE PROTEST MEETINGS WAS THE DEATH OF THE STUDENT, CHARTS AND BANNERS RAISED DURING THE MARCH AND CEREMONY INCLUDED THE USUAL ANTI-US, ANTI-IMPERIALISM, ANTI-FASCIST SLOGANS TO BE EXPECTED IN SUCH GROUPINGS. THE CLOSING OF THE BRIDGES WAS AN EXTRAORDINARY ACT, THE FIRST TIME IT HAD BEEN DONE SINCE MARCH 1970 DURING A TIME OF LABOR DISTURBANCES. THE SWIFT ACTION OF THE AUTHORITIES IN PREVENTING THE PLANNED LINK-UP DEMONSTRATED THE SERIOUSNESS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITH WHICH THE AUTHORITIES VIEW THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE AND THEIR DETERMINATION TO PREVENT A RECURRENCE OF THE STUDENT MELEES OF 1969-70. WITH UNIVERSITIES CLOSED FOR THE HOLIDAYS UNTIL AFTER THE NEW YEAR, PRESUMABLY THE THREAT OF FURTHER STUDENT CLASHES OR PROTESTS HAS ABATED TEMPORARILY. HOWEVER, PASSIONS ARE CLEARLY RUNNING DEEP IN BOTH CAMPS AND WITH THE RESUMPTION OF CLASSES (AND POTENTIAL POLITICAL ACTIVITY) AFTER THE NEW YEAR, THE AUTHORITIES MAY FIND THEMSELVES INCREASINGLY HARD PUT TO AVOID

FURTHER ERUPTIONS OF VIOLENCE.

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